

Communicating with the Memory Impaired

Be Supportive:

- Avoid quizzing and calling attention to mistakes.
- Correct misinformation indirectly rather than confronting.
- Avoid talking about the person's problems in front of them.

Simplify:

- Use simple language and short sentences.
- Handle only one idea at a time.
- Use pointing and gesturing to give additional information.
- Avoid too much stimulation.
- Reduce distractions such as TV, noise, or too many speakers.

Reassure:

- If communication fails, reassure him that it is alright and we'll come back to it.
- Use a soft, friendly voice.
- Gentle touch can also be calming.

Listen:

- Avoid interrupting or arguing.
- Maintain eye contact.
- Tune in to feelings rather than details.
- Allow time for processing and responding.

Focus on the familiar:

- Talk about familiar topics such as family, hobbies, friends.
- Familiar photo albums can provide material for conversation.
- Establish a consistent daily routine for meals, exercise, TV, etc.

Repeat:

- Rephrase important information throughout your conversation.
- State your name instead of asking the person to recall it.

Compensate:

- Provide a daily written schedule, calendar and/or journal; review at the beginning and end of each day.
- Keep a "memory notebook" with:
 - a. Reference information (e.g.: names, phone numbers, medications)
 - b. List of things to do (e.g.: buy Mary a birthday card)
 - c. Things to remember (e.g.: John is going on vacation the week of August 12.)
- Use post-it notes around the house with important reminders. (E.g.: Don't let dog out; turn off stove.)

Stimulate:

- Talk about current events, TV shows, family happenings; encourage expression of opinions and related memories.
- Use photo albums, magazines, photography books, puzzles, games, music, hobbies and simple exercise.